

DISCOURSE ON CULTURE AND FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING IN GLOBALIZED CONTEXTS

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Abstract

The term ‘culture’ has undergone complex semantic transformations since its early use in 15th Century. Theoretical discourses on foreign language learning and Teaching incorporates insights from numerous definitions of culture, and many of them are being postulated as binary. Along with widely known distinctions like little-c and big-C culture, deep and surface culture, visible culture and invisible culture are some of them. Why the learners are learning a foreign language? What should be curriculum objectives of foreign language courses has been an area of interest for curriculum development in language courses. The paper tries to analyze the changes that brought into the culture discourse in foreign language curriculums in the context of globalization. The study postulates that the trans-cultural competence offers a comprehensive curriculum objective in globalizing contexts than intercultural competence for foreign language teaching and learning.

Keywords: Foreign language teaching, culture, globalization, communicative competence, inter and trans- cultural competence,

The term ‘culture’ and its turns

The term ‘culture’ has undergone complex semantic transformations since its early use in 15th Century (Williams 1983, p.87). Modern usage of the term can be broadly categorized into three dimensions. Early conceptualizations of culture denote a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development of human beings. The anthropological view of the culture has gained momentum in the 18th Century and denoted a way of life of a people, a period or a group or humanity in general. In common parlance this view of culture, in terms of specific particularities associated with a particular group of people, often equated with nation or ethnicity. These particularities refer to behavior, belief systems, history, language, customs, values, and so on of an ethnic group. The third dimension of culture refers to the intellectual and aesthetic works such as in music, literature, painting and sculpture, often referred to as culture with a capital C or ‘high’ culture. In daily contemporary usage this view of culture now also includes products and practices from popular (‘low’) culture, such as film, and mass-media (Quist, 2013). The use of

the terms 'high' and 'low' indicate the value judgments attached to these. Hence, Eagleton represents the view of 'high' and 'low' culture as the 'culture wars' (Eagleton, 2000 p.51). Theoretical discourses on foreign language learning and teaching incorporates insights from numerous definitions of culture, and many of them are being postulated as binary. Along with widely known distinctions like little-c and big-C culture, deep and surface culture, visible culture and invisible culture are some of them. Surface culture or "visible culture" is understood as those elements that can easily be observable and are often inalterable and representative of a country includes festivals and celebrations, tourist places, geographical sites, national symbols, food, and famous people. Deep culture or "invisible culture" claims that it embodies complex meanings related to socio-cultural norms, lifestyles, beliefs, assumptions, and values. The complexity of these elements relies on the fact that they contain diverse facets and manifestations (Chavez, 2002 p.123). For Kramersch 'cultural component' in language teaching constitutes itself along three axes: the diachronic axis of time, the synchronic axis of space, and the metaphoric axis of the imagination (Kramersch, 1995, p. 3). *The American Council on Teaching of Foreign Languages* (ACTFL) divides culture in three ways, into practices, products, and perspectives. For ACTFL, teaching objective of the cultural component is based on relating cultural practices and products to gain perspectives by the learners about the target culture. Herron et al. subsequently aligned products with Big-C and practices with little-c culture. By contrasting culture with literature and to find out what comprises culture and how it differs from and overlaps with literature constitutes another method of studying culture in relation to language.

Language and culture and their symbiotic unity

The relationship between language and culture has been an area of study for decades now. John Kirk (2001) postulates three possible roles between language and culture. Firstly, language expresses culture, i.e. there are native speakers who spontaneously speak it as a mother tongue, without, conscious learning. Secondly language substantiates culture, i.e. language has a transactional or utilitarian or functional value of its own, without the need for translation or assistance from other languages. Thirdly language symbolizes culture that the language has a significance for insiders and/or outsiders regardless of the first two roles (Kirk 2001, p. 18). For Kramersch (1995) culture manifests itself through language in many ways where language mediates, interprets and records the culture.

“Material culture is constantly mediated, interpreted and recorded — among other things —through language and it is because of that mediatory role of language that culture becomes the concern of the language teacher. Culture in short is always a linguistically mediated membership into a discourse community that is both real and imagined (Kramersch 1995, p. 2).

David Parkin (1991) from a discourse centered approach argues that the distinction between language and culture, considered as separate systems, collapses in 'communication'. Therefore Language and culture are inseparably part of each other, and both are ultimately communicative and both are subject to improvisation and interpretation and together form a 'hermeneutic bricolage of everyday life'. Parkin suggested that the language and culture to be re-positioned as denoting interpenetrating semantic fields rather than separate systems.(Parkin 1991). Brian Moeran(1991) framing the understanding of the language-culture relationship in terms of the hierarchical Saussurian oppositions between langue and parole, and between culture and the

individual and argues 'Language pre-empts culture. The linguistic capacities to name and classify bring the non-linguistic into the realm of the cultural'. Though language and culture represents unity in linguistic utterances, expressions and acts, culture is not limited only to linguistic, communicative acts but also includes human aesthetic artistic creations and practices beyond the linguistic realm. "Language (learning and teaching) and culture are mutually implicated, but culture is multiple and complex" (Atkinson 1999, p.647) It is this symbiotic unity of language and culture makes the culture relevant for language teachers.

Culture and language curricula

Matthew Arnold's view of culture as 'the best of the knowledge and thought of the time' (1889, p.56) represents liberal humanist educational paradigm on culture. Aesthetic activities and products, is the view of culture which has been traditionally assumed in modern degree awarding language programs. Culture was (and in certain institutions still is), mostly seen through the prism of the literary canon, the 'high' view of culture, which combines the aesthetic view with the hierarchical view of culture as civilization (Quist 2013, p.23). The teaching of these elements that usually might appear in the language curriculum maintain a "received view of culture" (Atkinson, 1999, p.626) because learners only act as passive receivers, filling their minds with representative cultural information that proudly distinguishes a nation from the others. Kramersch (1995) argues that foreign language teaching and learning enables the learner to have a critical construction of one's own culture and facilitate the cultural change. Language learning and Teaching is not only concerned with the possibility of changing people's attitudes by giving them a new vocabulary to construct social realities (whether they be national, gendered, or racial realities) but also a more sober room for maneuver against more powerful institutional ideological forces and these changes are not immediate and direct, but occurs slowly.

"However, this power (to bring changes to culture) is not monolithic and education has never brought about change directly and immediately. Social change occurs slowly, but inevitably at the edges of dominant cultures. This is true also of the change that we might want to bring about by teaching people how to use somebody else's linguistic code in somebody else's cultural context. Teaching members of one community how to talk and how to behave in the context of another discourse community potentially changes the social and cultural equation of both communities, by subtly diversifying mainstream cultures"(Kramersch 1995, p.3).

Russell Berman (1994) recommends a field of study to "promote a systematic inquiry into the theoretical underpinnings of the study of culture as pertinent to the foreign languages areas" ("Foreign Languages" 6). Heidi Beynes(2002) articulates four areas of enquiry in relation to foreign language teaching and culture.

"How can an anthropologically or sociologically constituted notion of culture, as it has come to dominate cultural studies, encourage and guide intellectual contributions by foreign language scholars in a way that recognizes the peculiarities of foreign language and culture study? If this encouragement is not possible, are there other approaches to culture that would better facilitate the nexus? How, precisely, do we imagine language to be related to culture, beyond the in consequential assertion that it is impossible to study language without culture or that culture is represented, transmitted, and perpetuated by language? How does a relation that is initially probed in a single language and single

culture context need to be expanded in the multi-language and multi-culture context that characterizes the intellectual work of foreign language departments? How do these considerations translate into the programmatic and pedagogical practices of foreign language departments, with the potential of invigorating them and, through them, the foreign language field?" (Beynes 2002, p.116).

As a part of higher education systems foreign language courses experience a dynamic relationship with the socio-economic and socio-cultural changes of a country. It has become increasingly important for language curricula to analyze the impact of globalization on national cultures and how it influences the foreign language curricula after 1991.

Globalization and its impact on culture

Though the economic globalization as a process whereby the goods and services are produced in one country and consumed in another and vice versa is not a new phenomenon (Huwart J.Y & L.Verdier 2013, p.20). What is new in the globalization process of 1991 is the scale in which the governments actively promote the movement of goods and services through liberalizing policies, bilateral and multilateral agreements between the nations (Mathachan 2016, p.22). Globalization is the integration of economies, industries, markets, cultures and policy-making around the world. It is a process by which national and regional economies, societies, and cultures have become integrated through the global network of trade, communication, immigration and transportation. Economic globalization can be understood as the restrictionless movement of goods, services and people across the countries. In his book *Globalization and its Discontents*, Joseph Stiglitz defines economic globalisation as "...the closer integration of the countries and peoples of the world which has been brought about by the enormous reduction of costs of transportation and communication, and the breaking down of artificial barriers to the flows of goods, services, capital, knowledge, and (to a lesser extent) people across borders." (Stiglitz, 2002).

Ever increasing movement of goods, services and people across the globe intensifies the contacts between the social groups and cultural identities. "As cultural process, globalization names the explosion of a plurality of mutually intersecting, individually syncretic, local differences; the emergence of new, hitherto suppressed identities; and the expansion of a world-wide media and technology culture with the promise of popular democratization"(Jameson 1998). Cultural globalization is caused by the Global Media explosion. Attention on global events and the emphasis on the inter-dependency of humanity promoted by the Media increased the rate of change in the cultural identities. "Electronic media gives the new twist to the environment within which the modern and the global often appears as the flip slides of the same coin" (Appadurai A.1996). Through the 'scapes theory' Appadurai (1996) argues that the globalization is not a homogenization of culture but it is glocalization resulted from the "flowing" of technology "techno-scapes", economy "finance- scapes", media "mediascapes" and ideology "ideo-scapes" through the movement of people over cultural and national boundaries. These "flows" through "-scapes" change the conceptions of "center" and "periphery" of culture and create imagined worlds that are created by different people and groups" (Appdurai 1996,p.48).

The views of the scholars on globalization can be broadly categorized into three groups: radicals, moderates and skeptics. Radicals identify the globalization as a new era, supported by laissez faire capitalism and technology and will lead to the homogenization of the cultures and will create a global civilization. Moderate view on globalization argues that it is a contingent, contradictory historical process and represents Post-industrial society and will lead to hybridization of the cultures. For sceptics there is nothing new in the process of globalization and will remain as a myth which is caused by the interest of Western nations and internationalization of the economies will finally lead to fragmentation and clash of civilizations.

Intercultural competence and Trans- cultural competence

Keller (2012) identifies the culture in three levels, Container-cultures shows homogeneity internally and in comparing with other cultures it projects differences. Inter-culturality originates from intercultural relationships. Interculturality allows one to identify the difference in the target culture than one's own culture and brings openness understanding and tolerance against the other cultures. Trans-culturality includes not only describing and analyzing and making journeys to target culture but also to comprehend and experience and live as the part of the target culture. (Keller 2012, p.120). The curriculum objectives of the foreign language learning courses were and still are oriented towards the intercultural competence among the learners i.e, learner shall be able to understand and describe the differences and similarities between the target and one's own culture and gain insights into one's own culture. *Modern Languages Association* report (2007) emphasizes the scenario across the globe in foreign language teaching and learning.

“The standard configuration of university foreign language curricula, in which a two- or three-year language sequence feeds into a set of core courses primarily focused on canonical literature, also represents a narrow model. This configuration defines both the curriculum and the governance structure of language departments and creates a division between the language curriculum and the literature curriculum and between tenure-track literature professors and language instructors in non-tenure-track positions.”(MLA Report,2007)

Many factors has changed in the world of today. Globalization has swept over the globe so intensely in the last two to three decades.

“Many factors in the world today make advanced study of languages and cultures appealing to students and vital to society. Replacing the two-tiered language-literature structure with a broader and more coherent curriculum in which language, culture, and literature are taught as a continuous whole, supported by alliances with other departments and expressed through interdisciplinary courses, will reinvigorate language departments as valuable academic units central to the humanities and to the missions of institutions of higher learning” (MLA Report,2007).

In order to accommodate these changes the foreign language curriculum shall be redesigned so that it can enable the learner to withstand the challenges and gain from the globalization process.

Transcultural competence as curriculum objective will benefit both learners and teachers and institutions and policy makers.

“The idea of translingual and transcultural competence....in contrast, places value on the ability to operate between languages. Students are educated to function as informed and capable interlocutors with educated native speakers in the target language. They are also trained to reflect on the world and themselves through the lens of another language and culture”.MLA Report 2007)“The aim of transcultural competence is not only to give learners an outsider's perspective on their own personal situation but also to give them confidence as a 'foreign' insider in another culture. It is not desirable to encourage learners to emulate the culture of the foreign language they learn, but they should be encouraged constantly to move from one point of view to the other”(Seidl 1998,p.108). “One possible model defines transcultural understanding as the ability to comprehend and analyze the cultural narratives that appear in every kind of expressive form—from essays, fiction, poetry, drama, journalism, humor, advertising, political rhetoric, and legal documents to performance, visual forms, and music” (MLA Report 2007).

Therefore it has become imperative for foreign language curriculum to react to the new challenges and opportunities arising out of Globalization process. Transcultural competence as curriculum objectives offers an probable solution to our current issues in foreign language education. The major duty of the teachers in this perspective to find out intellectually provocative narratives from all the fields of the target culture and to offer critically in the language classrooms.

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